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SUBJECT: NEC DISCUSSES PREPARATIONS FOR APRIL ELECTIONS WITH SE
GRATION

CLASSIFIED BY: Robert E. Whitehead, CDA; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Sudan's National Elections Commission (NEC) talked about plans and concerns for the upcoming national elections in a February 21 meeting with U.S. Special Envoy Scott Gration. The NEC Chairman, Deputy and two other commission members updated SE Gration on the status of logistical preparations; national observers; recount and voter challenge procedures; and obstacles ahead. End Summary.

Logistical Arrangements Moving Ahead

¶2. (C) The NEC Chairman Abel Alier, Deputy Chairman Abdallah Ahmed Abdallah, and two other NEC members described to SE Gration on February 21 how preparations for the April national elections are moving ahead. Alier said that most voting materials are already in country, with a few additional containers expected to arrive within days. (Note. In fact, by all accounts, legislative ballots, which are to be printed in South Africa and the United Kingdom, have not yet been ordered. End Note.) He told SE Gration that a transportation committee was meeting to work on plans for shipping approximately 48,000 tons of election materials to states in Northern and Southern Sudan. Alier noted that they had approached the Government of National Unity to provide funding for this exercise, as well as donors.

Observers for Ballot Printing and Voting

¶3. (C) The NEC Chairman expressed confidence in the firm that will print voting ballots and noted that it is the same press that prints Sudanese currency. However, to ensure transparency and add credibility, he said the commission has agreed to allow six political party and two or three international observers witness the ballot printing process. According to Alier, the Carter Center is at the top of the list of international observers who will be invited to monitor this process.

¶4. (C) On the topic of national election-day observers, Deputy Chairman Abdallah explained that political party agents differ from national observers in their roles, as well as accreditation procedures. The NEC refused to consider accreditation for national observers who do not meet their pre-determined criteria, which includes possession of the national identification card. Both Alier and Abdallah discounted the argument that this requirement would exclude national observer representation from some areas of Sudan. Abdallah said party agents are not subject to the identification card requirement and need only to present a properly authenticated letter from their respective political party. With these credentials, the party agents can sit in polling stations on election day and monitor activities. The NEC members insisted that there are sufficient non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with

members who meet the requirements and are capable of performing this role and they represent every Sudanese state.

Run-Off, Recount and Challenge Procedures

¶ 15. (C) According to the NEC leadership, election procedures provide for run-off, recount and challenges. The Chairman noted that while provisions are made in case there is no clear majority winner among Presidential candidates in the April elections, the commission is also trying to avoid spending money and resources for items that may not be needed. He did not specify what type of provisions the NEC is making in the event a run-off becomes reality. Alier re-affirmed the NEC position that a run-off election, if needed, must occur before the rainy season is fully underway. He expressed doubt that a recount would be called for since political party agents will observe the entire process, to include ballot counting. Nevertheless, in the event a recount is needed, it would occur, although he did not specify by whom or how the recount would take place. Any challenge to an announced winner will be investigated and a recount performed as necessary. If these measures fail to verify the winner, the case may be taken to the courts for a final ruling.

Difficulties Ahead

¶ 16. (C) Deputy Chairman Abdallah noted security concerns, especially
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with the police, in Southern Sudan as one of the challenges remaining over the weeks leading up to election-day. Chairman Alier highlighted the need for improved security both in the North and South and said the government should have increased federal funding to address the issues. Abdallah further noted the need for additional logistical and technical support, along with enhanced capacity in the South. Voter education also needs to be strengthened as, according to Abdallah, the political parties are not doing a good job. He was concerned that voters learn how to cast their votes properly before polling days. He stressed the lack of sufficient training and civic education. Abdallah also commended the donor community for their assistance and work but wanted to see more assistance from partners, especially in building capacity.

¶ 17. (C) Comment: While the NEC says it wants international assistance to build capacity, such technical assistance is offered but it is not always accepted. The electoral preparations have seen progress but continue to have ups and downs. The NEC has a full plate in the weeks before election-day, and it is not certain that the NEC is as on schedule as its leaders insist. End Comment.

¶ 18. (U) This cable has been cleared by the Office of the Special Envoy to Sudan.
WHITEHEAD